

Return Jonathan Meigs to Andrew Jackson, May 24, 1817, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

RETURN J. MEIGS TO JACKSON.

Cherokee Agency, May 24, 1817.

. . . . With respect to the exchange of lands, there are a number of the best characters who have decidedly expressed their minds in favor it: But some overbearing characters still retaining their ancient barbarous habits and customs, have had recourse to threatening those who hold sentiments in favor of the views of the Government; especially when the disposition of lands is in question. Toochalee, Colonel R. Brown, and others who have, and still are in favor of an exchange of land, are under some restraint on that account. It is undoubtedly a very interesting object to the Cherokee nation. It is in my opinion the only measure within their power to preserve and perpetuate their existence, I mean their existence as a Distinct Community, nation, or tribe. The progress, the overflowing population of our Country has already surrounded these people, and the pressure on their Country here on all sides is incessant; and will eventually circumscribe the limits of the Cherokee nation within narrow bounds, they must either become industrious Citizens and be incorporated with some one, or with several of the adjoining states, or remove to a Country *where* they can retain their ancient customs, so dear to them, that they cannot give them up in exchange for regular society.

If they could be made to view their past, and their present State, and future national prospects: they would embrace the present opportunity to acquire a Country where they might perpetuate their Identity as a Distinct people. If, say, one half of these people are disposed seriously to become civilized, let them have distinct property here; become

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citizens, that themselves and property may be protected by our laws: but let the other half who still cherish their ancient customs and habits remove to the Arkansas river where they will live well, by a very small portion of labour, and where to the remotest time, there will be an opening to the West and Northwest. The domestic manufacture of Cloth may be as well carried on there as here, and is now done there by the women the same as is done here at this time. The government will afford the same aid to the emigrants as is done here. . . .

At the approaching conference there will be a very great assemblage of people red and white. liquor will be plenty, there will be disorders unless restrained by the presence of a few troops—a few regular troops in Uniform will do more than a host of others, to preserve respect on such an Occasion; besides there are a great number of Intruders on the Indian lands who have returned since Lieut. Houston was in this part of the Country.

I have the honor to be